

Dr. David Mathewson, New Testament Literature,

Session 17 - 1 Corinthians--Spiritual Gifts

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Hey everyone, ready for another deep dive? This time, we're going way back to the early Christian Church in Corinth, and you might be thinking Ancient history? Why should I care? Stick with us. Yeah, this is about more than just dusty old scrolls. We're going to uncover some really interesting stuff about power and status and how those early Christians navigated their faith in a really complex world. Yeah, we'll be using a lecture by a New Testament scholar. Dr. Dave Mathewson as our guide, right? Corinth was not exactly the peaceful, lovey-dovey image.

We often have a really Christian image, right? No, not exactly; Corinth was this bustling port city. Imagine a huge mix of cultures and religions, and big personalities. Yeah, and this idea that early Christianity was all peaceful and unified yeah, Corinth kind of throws a wrench in that; it definitely does.

So what was it about Corinth that made things so intense? Well, imagine a place where your social status was everything. Dr. Mathewson talks about this thing called the patron-client relationship. It was a social structure that was woven into every aspect of life, even religion. So even in a community that's supposed to be all about equality, right people were still trying to climb the social ladder. It's a little like high school, but with spiritual overtones.

Oh, I like that. Yeah, and here's where it gets even more interesting: back then, some religions thought Ecstatic speech, like speaking in tongues, was a sign of elite status. Yeah, so speaking in tongues was a status symbol. That's crazy.

It might sound strange to us now, yeah, but in that context it kind of makes sense. Okay, I'm starting to see it, and that's where the problems start. It seems like some Corinthians were using spiritual gifts, especially tongues, to basically climb the social ladder in the church. Wow. So we're talking power struggles and one-upmanship. Yeah, even in a spiritual context, exactly, and that's what Paul, author of Corinthians Yeah, is trying to deal with in his letter to the church in Corinth. Yeah, he's not saying that speaking in tongues is bad, but he is worried about how it's being used and how people are seeing it. So, how does Paul try to dismantle this whole spiritual gift hierarchy? Does he just tell them to knock it off? He's a lot more subtle than that.

Okay, he gives this list of all these spiritual gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, right? Like he's putting on display all the different ways the Spirit can work. He's making a point, isn't he? Absolutely. He's showing that no one gift is inherently more spiritual than another. He's challenging how they think and trying to even the playing field. I love it, and then get this: he puts tongues last on the list, right? It's like he's saying Hey everybody, tongues are just one gift among many exactly He's shifting the focus from what makes individuals special to what's good for the whole community. Yeah, every gift, he's saying, is from the same spirit, and it's meant to help everybody. Wow, that's a really

powerful message. So instead of competing to be the most spiritual, he's encouraging them to work together, right? I'm starting to see why this letter is still so relevant today.

It really is, and to really drive home this idea of unity, Paul uses a powerful metaphor: the church as the body of Christ. Oh, yeah, that's a good one. We've got to talk about that body metaphor. Yeah, powerful stuff, but I have to admit I'm still trying to really wrap my head around it. Sure. So is Paul basically saying that the church is like a body and each person is like a different part of that body? That's right. Just like a physical body needs all of its parts to work right, from the heart and lungs all the way to your pinky toes, the church needs all the gifts of all its members. So even those gifts that seem less important, right, are still important to the overall health of the community. Yeah, they all contribute.

I'm starting to see how this challenges the whole idea of spiritual VIPs. Everyone's contribution matters, exactly. It's a radical idea of unity and diversity. Yeah, but wait- there's a bit of a twist. Okay, Dr. Matthewson points out that Paul actually encourages the Corinthians to try for greater gifts. Doesn't that seem to contradict the whole equality thing? Whoa.

Yeah, good point. On one hand, he says all gifts are valuable, right, but then he's talking about greater gifts. I'm confused. It does seem like a contradiction. Yeah, what's going on here if we look closer? We see that Paul is making a really nuanced point.

Okay, I'm all ears. He points to prophecy as a gift that should be pursued. Prophecy, so you mean like predicting the future? Not exactly. In the early church, prophecy wasn't mainly about fortune-telling, gotcha. It was more about getting a message from God, okay, and then communicating that to the community in a way that would build them up and encourage them. So it's like inspired teaching or preaching that really speaks to what people are going through. Yeah, exactly. Okay, so that makes sense.

Yeah, but how does that make prophecy a greater gift? Paul really stresses how prophecy benefits the whole church. Mm-hmm. Not just the person prophesying. It's a gift that kind of multiplies and spreads encouragement and insight to everyone I see, so it's not about the prophet getting all the attention.

It's about how that gift can help everyone. Exactly. Okay, so now I see the difference, and this is where the contrast with tongues comes in, right? Paul's not saying tongues are bad. Yeah, but he does say that it's mainly a personal experience. Yeah, like a private prayer language, right? He even says that people speaking in tongues are speaking mysteries that no one else can understand, right? There's definitely value in those personal spiritual experiences, but when the church is together, yeah, Paul thinks the focus should be on things that build up the whole community, not just individuals. Like if you're hanging out with friends, yeah, you probably wouldn't spend the whole time talking on the phone in another language, right? You'd want to talk in ways that everyone could understand and enjoy. It's all about being mindful of the situation and thinking about what others need. Yeah, Paul is calling for balance, right? He wants the Corinthians to use their gifts in ways that make the whole community stronger. This is making me rethink how we view spiritual gifts today.

It's not about getting validation or trying to be special. It's about helping others and making a difference in the community. That's such a crucial point, and remember.

Yeah, Dr. Mathewson reminds us that Paul isn't trying to make an exhaustive list of every single spiritual gift out there, right? The Holy Spirit works in so many ways and the ways we try to Categorize and define every gift might be missing the point. It might be that it makes me think about those spiritual gift inventories. Yes, they can be helpful. But maybe we shouldn't let them box us in and limit our understanding of how God might be working through us. That's a great point.

So the main message is that spiritual gifts aren't about us and what we've accomplished. They're about God's grace working through us to help others. That's it. Okay, so we've been talking about how gifts should work in the community, but Dr. Mathewson brings up another really interesting point in his lecture. He talks about how some Corinthians were actually denying the physical resurrection. So, what does that have to do with spiritual gifts? At first, it seems like a totally different topic. Yeah, what if you connect it to the bigger picture? Okay, you see that it's all part of this underlying theme of Spiritual pride and elitism that Paul has been talking about. I see; help me understand how denying the resurrection fits into all this. Well, think about it: if you believe that you've already reached some sort of spiritual perfection or enlightenment in this life, why would you even need a physical resurrection? It wouldn't matter; it becomes totally irrelevant. It's like they're saying we're so spiritually advanced. We don't even need a physical body anymore. It's like that's some kind of spiritual superiority complex.

Yeah, and that kind of elitism is really dangerous. Okay, it cuts faith off from the reality of our physical existence, and Paul's not having it. He's like, hold on a second, denying the resurrection is denying the very core of our faith, right? It's a pretty bold move to challenge something. So fundamental it is.

So what were these Corinthians thinking? Yeah, why would they deny something so central to their beliefs? Yeah, remember, Dr. Mathewson mentioned the influence of Greek philosophy. Okay, specifically Plato's ideas. That emphasized how the spiritual realm was better than the physical, right? It's possible that some Corinthians were trying to mix these philosophical ideas with their Christian beliefs, and it led them down a dangerous path So they were kind of picking and choosing what parts of Christianity they liked.

Yeah, creating their own version. It's like a spiritual buffet. You take what you want and leave the rest. Oh, I love that. That's exactly it.

And this is why what Paul is saying is so important, right? He's calling them back to the most basic truths of the gospel. Okay, reminding them that salvation includes our whole being, both body and soul. So the physical resurrection isn't just some optional side belief. No, it's not; it's absolutely essential to the whole story. Paul argues that death is the last enemy to be defeated.

Okay, and that victory requires a physical resurrection. It's not just about our souls going off to some ethereal place. It's about our bodies being restored and made new and brought back together with our spirits in a new creation. That's such a helpful message. It makes me

rethink what it means to be a Christian. It's not about escaping this world, right? It's about God redeeming and restoring everything.

Yes, including our bodies. That's a really beautiful way to put it. It really speaks to the big theme of 1st Corinthians. What's that? Dr. Matthewson says it's about the purity of the church in the midst of a pagan culture.

Okay. Now we're getting into something interesting. So it's not just about avoiding certain behaviors. It's about protecting our hearts and minds from the influences of the world that can mess up our understanding of the gospel. That's a really important takeaway, and we'll keep talking about this idea of purity and what it means for the church in part 3 of our deep dive.

That's good. All right, we're back for the final part of our deep dive into the early church in Corinth. It's been quite a journey. Wouldn't you say we've uncovered power struggles, status symbols, even debates about the resurrection? It's amazing how much those early Christians had to deal with. I know, right, and as we've been exploring with Dr. Matthewson's lecture.

Yeah, a lot of these challenges are still so relevant today, even thousands of years later. Totally. Before we wrap things up, though. I want to hear more about this idea of purity. Okay, dr.

Matthewson keeps coming back to it. It sounds kind of intense. Yeah, it does. What exactly does he mean by purity in this context? Yeah, what's he getting at? That's a really great question, and it can be easy to get the wrong idea about what Paul is talking about, right? It's not just about moral purity in terms of how you act.

Although that is definitely a part of it, okay, but it's bigger than that. So what is it about them? It's more about protecting the church's identity and mission when there's all this pressure from the outside world, like holding on to your core values. Yeah, even when the culture around you is trying to pull you in a different direction. Exactly. Remember, Corinth was this incredible mix of cultures and religious ideas.

Yeah, the early Christians were constantly being exposed to all these different beliefs and practices, right? It's so easy to just blend in and lose sight of what made them unique. Exactly, that makes sense. So, how does Paul help them move towards this purity? He's talking about, well, he does give them some guidelines. Okay, but he also uses this powerful image to explain what he means: the church as a temple. Oh, yeah, in the Old Testament the temple was where God lived. It was a holy place set apart for worship. I see, and so now Paul is saying that the church, the community of believers, right, is the new temple, so not a building anymore; the people are the temple, exactly. And just like they were supposed to keep the physical temple pure and undefiled, the church is called to maintain its spiritual purity, too. I see. So what kind of defilement was Paul worried about? Was it specific sins? Well, he does mention several things that could hurt the unity and the purpose of the church, like divisions, immorality, and even a wrong understanding of spiritual gifts- right, those power struggles we talked about before. Exactly, that kind of disunity actually contaminates the holy space of the community.

So it's not just about what individuals do, but how their actions affect the whole community. That's right. It's like if one part of the body is sick. Yeah, the whole body suffers. That's a great way to put it. Paul sees the church as this interconnected thing. What each person does has an impact on everyone else.

It really does. This is all making so much more sense. Now. It goes back to that body metaphor. We're all connected, and our actions matter they do but there's one thing I'm still not quite getting: What's that if Paul's so concerned about purity? Why does he seem okay with the Corinthians continuing to participate in some pagan cultural practice? Oh, yeah, like eating meat offered to idols.

That's it. That seems kind of contradictory. It does, doesn't it, and this really highlights how hard it is to live out your faith in a world with so many different Beliefs and values. Yeah, it does. Paul knows that there's nothing wrong with the meat itself. Okay, what he's worried about is whether it might cause someone else to stumble. So it's about thinking about how your actions might affect other believers. Yes, even if I'm okay with something, right, if it might lead someone else to sin or question their faith, maybe I should reconsider. Exactly. For Paul, love and consideration for others are more important than personal freedom. That's really challenging; it is, but also really powerful.

It really is. It's not about me and my rights, right? It's about putting the needs of others first. This whole conversation is making me rethink what it means to be part of a faith community. That's what makes Paul's message

So relevant even today. Yeah, he's not talking about some kind of isolated, selfish spirituality; he's calling for a community that engages with the world while still holding on to its core values. That's such a delicate balance. It is like walking a tightrope, but it's a walk worth taking, and it brings us to Dr. Mathewson's final thought-provoking question.

Okay, and it's really stuck with me. What is it? He asks: If Paul were writing to your community today, what spiritual gift hierarchy might he challenge? What gifts are we overlooking or not valuing enough? What subtle influences from our culture are we letting creep into the church and mess up its mission? Those are tough questions; they are, but they're so important for us to grapple with. Yeah, they really are. It's easy to get caught up in our own Preferences and perspectives, right? But Paul reminds us that the church isn't about us, huh? It's about God working through us in all of our messy diversity. Yeah, to bring love and hope to the world. This has been an incredible deep dive. It has challenged me to think differently about spiritual gifts, community, and how to live out my faith in a world that's constantly pulling me in different directions. That's the amazing thing about deep dives.

Yeah, they're not just about learning facts. It's about wrestling with ideas and challenging what you think, you know, right, and coming away with a deeper understanding of yourself and your faith. I couldn't have said it better myself. Well, that's all the time we have for today, okay, but keep asking those tough questions, keep pushing back against the status quo, yes, and keep diving deep